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ABSTRACT

Adult educator role descriptions found in the literature include the following: teacher, instructor, helper, facilitator, consultant, broker, change agent, and mentor. The literature that speaks directly to the adult educator's role is scanty. A larger body of literature exists, however, that either alludes to adult educators' roles or contains information from which ideas about their roles can be surmised. One clear trend in the literature on roles is a connection between philosophical beliefs about adult education and the type of role described. For example, publications can be found that do the following: support the radical tradition in education; explore adult educator roles for a civil society; and examine adult educator roles in experiential learning. A related issue is the question of how adult educators perceive their roles versus how roles are described in the literature. Among other related topics addressed in the literature are the following: suggested future roles of adult educators; markets that adult educators could tap in reshaping their roles; and information about careers in the future that adult educators can use to either shape their roles or develop programs and services for learners. (An annotated bibliography that contains 19 references constitutes approximately 75% of this document.) (MN)

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

by Susan Imel

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Roles for Adult Educators

The role of adult educator has been defined broadly. Adult educator role descriptions found in the literature include the following: teacher, instructor, helper, facilitator, consultant, broker, change agent, and mentor (e.g., Boud and Miller 1998; Johnson 1998). Surprisingly, the literature that speaks directly to adult educator role is scanty because "considerably more attention [has] been paid in adult education to the learner than to the teacher" (Boud and Miller 1998, p. 1). A larger body of literature exists, however, that either alludes to adult educators' roles or contains information from which ideas about their roles can be surmised. Some trends and issues related to roles for adult educators are described in this *Alert*. A list of resources is included for further information on the topic.

A clear trend in the literature on roles is a connection between philosophical beliefs about adult education and the type of role described. Cunningham (1996), for example, supports the radical tradition in adult education by arguing that adult educators should work in socially responsible and relevant ways "to actively promote continuous societal change by promoting the ideals of participatory democracy defined as full citizen participation, freedom, equality and social justice" (p. 1). In her exploration of adult educator roles for a civil society, Johnson (1998) found that responses about appropriate roles could range from the liberal to the technical/functional to the more radical, but she proposed that adult educators work in ways that foster a social purpose without coopting learners. When examining adult educator roles in experiential learning, Boud and Miller (1998) discovered that conflict existed between the two traditions that were important in the development of experiential learning theories because one focused on individuals and the other on groups. They drew on the characteristics of each of the traditions to create the role of animator that draws on both the individual and the collective and that "incorporates considerations of context, power and shifting identities" (p. 6).

An issue related to this trend is the question of how adult educators perceive their roles versus how roles are described in the literature. In a study conducted by Fenwick (1996), adult educators viewed themselves in ways that "contradicted commonly espoused educational philosophies and practices" (p. 16). They made little reference to power dynamics—either social, cultural, or organizational—that affect the teaching-learning process, and they saw themselves as being responsible for creating a safe environment. This picture is quite different from that depicted in some of the literature on roles. Tisdell and Perry (1997) and Wilson and Cervero (1997) suggest that an appropriate role for adult educators may be to examine or challenge existing power structures; such actions may lead to environments that are uncomfortable for some learners.

Suggestions for future roles for adult educators can also be found in the literature. In discussing the future of adult education, some sources (e.g., Alheit 1999; Miller 1997) include information that can be used to predict roles. Futures literature itself can also be used to predict future roles for adult educators. Jennings (1999) for example, describes six distinct markets that adult educators could tap by reshaping their roles. Kotter (1995) and Moses (1999) provide information about careers in the future that can be used by adult educators either to shape their roles or in developing programs and services for learners.

In summary, the topic of roles for adult educators is complex and closely related to the goals and purposes of adult education. Although futures information can be used to predict future roles for adult educators, those roles will undoubtedly be connected to what individual adult educators believe are appropriate behaviors and actions.

Resources

Alheit, P. "On a Contradictory Way to the 'Learning Society': A Critical Approach." ***Studies in the Education of Adults*** 31, no. 4 (April 1999): 66-82.

The characteristics of a learning society of the future and the research issues involved are explored. Roles for adult educators are embedded in the vision of the future portrayed in the article.

Boud, D., and Miller, N. "Animating Learning: New Conceptions of the Role of the Person Who Works with Learners." In ***39th Annual Adult Education Research Conference Proceedings***, compiled by J. C. Kimmel. San Antonio, TX: University of the Incarnate Word, 1998. (ED 426 247) <http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/aerc/1998/98boud.htm>

Focuses on the role of the person who works with others to foster their learning and describes the struggle to make sense of the role. A perspective known as animation is identified and considered.

Cunningham, P. "Conceptualizing Our Work as Adult Educators in a Socially Responsible Way." In ***Constitutive Interplay Midst Discourse of East and West. Proceedings of the International Adult & Continuing Education Conference***, edited by P. Cunningham et al. Seoul, Korea: Chung-Ang University, 1996. (ED 401 405)

Explores the concern that adult educators should work in a socially responsible way while operating in a context that is increasingly driven by the theme of "learning for earning."

Dirkx, J.; Amey, M.; and Haston, L. "Teacher Beliefs and Subject Matter Boundaries: The Struggle for Curricular Transformation Among Teachers of Adults." In ***40th Annual Adult Education Research Conference Proceedings***, compiled by A. Rose. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, 1999. <http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/aerc.1999/99symp_dirkx.htm>

Describes how integrated approaches to curriculum and teaching affected the beliefs and meaning and perspectives of one group of developmental education teachers.

Echeverria, R. "The Observer and the Changing Self." ***Futures*** 31, no. 8 (October 1999): 818-823.

The emergence of a new world in which a permanent web of relationships will exist in every domain of human life is described. What it will mean to be a "self' in this world is discussed.

Fenwick, T. "Firestarters and Outfitters: Metaphors of Adult Educators." Paper presented at the 24th Annual Conference of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education, St. Catharines, Ontario, June 1996. (ED 400 436)

Approximately 65 adult educators developed metaphors describing their roles; six general themes emerged: adult educators as tour guide, firestarter, outfitter, caregiver, dispenser, and good host.

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Fenwick, T. "Reflection Plus 4: Classifying Alternate Perspectives in Experiential Learning." In ***40th Annual Adult Education Research Conference Proceedings***, compiled by A. Rose. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, 1999. <http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/aerc.1999/99fenwick.htm>

Five theoretical perspectives that can inform experiential learning are presented; the view of the educator's role, if any, is presented. A goal of the paper is to help educators constitute their roles relative to these perspectives.

Hall, B.; McKnight, J.; and Pandak, C. "Why Adult Educators Should Be Concerned with Civil Society." In ***40th Annual Adult Education Research Conference Proceedings***, compiled by A. Rose. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, 1999. <http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/aerc.1999/99symp_hall.htm>

This paper provides a local, national, and global perspective of civil society, identifies the types of organizational forms found within it, and explores the role of adult educators and adult education in shaping it.

Hansman, C.; Jackson, M. H.; Grant, D. F.; and Spencer, L. E. "Adult Graduate Students' Perceptions of Gender & Race: Implications for Program Development in Rural Communities." In ***40th Annual Adult Education Research Conference Proceedings***, compiled by A. Rose. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, 1999. <http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/aerc.1999/99symp_hansman.htm>

The role of faculty members in encouraging sensitivity to diversity in their classes is discussed in this paper.

Jennings, L. "The Buying and Selling of Dreams." ***The Futurist*** 33, no. 7 (August-September 1999): 8-9.

Six distinct "emotional markets" are profiled: the market for adventure; the market for love, friendship, and togetherness; the market for care; the who-am-I market; the peace of mind market; and the conviction market.

Johnson, R. "Adult Learning in a Civil Society—Exploring Roles for Adult Educators?" In ***Papers from the 28th Annual SCUTREA Conference. Research, Teaching and Learning: Making Connections in the Education of Adults***. Exeter, England: University of Exeter, July 1998. <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/000000728.htm>

This paper investigates the contemporary resurgence of interest in adult learning within civil society and the range of groups and organizations involved. Some possible roles for adult educators that serve the interests of adult learners yet avoid the dangers of colonization and tokenistic or rhetorical engagement are explored.

Kotter, J. P. "Lifetime Learning: The New Educational Imperative." ***The Futurist*** 29, no. 6 (November-December 1995): 27-29.

Using the careers of members of the Harvard Business School Class of 1974 as a basis, this article presents ideas of how education has to change to prepare individuals for successful careers in the postmodern era.

Lauzon, A. "In Search of a Future: Adult Education and the Psychology of the Soul." ***International Journal of Lifelong Education*** 15, no. 5 (September-October 1998): 318-327. (EJ 573 027)

Argues for the need for adult education based on the psychology of the soul that the author defines as a way of knowing, understanding, constructing meaning, and acting in the world that results in unity through action, movement, and effort. Provides implications for the practice of adult education.

Miller, P. A. "Strengthening Civil Society: Adult Education's International Challenge in the 21st Century." ***Convergence*** 30, no. 1 (1997): 15-23. (EJ 546 858)

Continuous civic learning and participation can result in a sense of community upon which civil society depends. Five collaborative, international tasks on which adult educators can focus to achieve a civil society in the 21st century are described.

Moore, B., and Hill, L. H. "Preaching What We Practice: Theories-in-Use in Community Development." In ***39th Annual Adult Education Research Conference Proceedings***, compiled by J. C. Kimmel. San Antonio, TX: University of the Incarnate Word, 1998. (ED 426 247) <http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/aerc/1998/98moore.htm>

Examines theories-in-use in among community development practitioners. Information about how practitioners perceive their roles is included.

Moses, B. "Career Intelligence: The 12 New Rules for Success." ***The Futurist*** 33, no. 7 (August-September 1999): 28-35.

Presents rules for careers that could be used by adult educators to shape their roles or in developing programs and services for adult learners.

Pratt, D. D. et al. ***Five Perspectives on Teaching in Adult and Higher Education***. Malabar, FL: Kreiger, 1998.

Five perspectives on teaching are presented: transmission, apprenticeship, developmental, nurturing, and social reform. Based on extensive interviews with teachers, these perspectives also reflect roles of teachers of adults.

Tisdell, E. J., and Perry, C. "Teaching across Borders: A Collaborative Inter-racial 'Border' Pedagogy in Adult Multicultural Education Classes." In ***38th Annual Adult Education Research Conference Proceedings***, compiled by R. E. Nolan and H. Chelesvig. Stillwater: Oklahoma State University, 1997. (ED 409 460) <http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/aerc/1997/97tisdell.htm>

This study examined how power dynamics were manifested between and among instructors and students in two graduate level classes team-taught by black and white female co-instructors. Attempts were made to identify the roles or practices of adult educators that lead to growth and social change among participants.

Wilson, A. L, and Cervero, R. M. "Beyond Disciplinary Consumption in Program Planning Courses: Dilemmas in Teaching with and About Power." In ***38th Annual Adult Education Research Conference Proceedings***, compiled by R. E. Nolan and H. Chelesvig. Stillwater: Oklahoma State University, 1997. (ED 409 460)

Courses in adult education such as program planning are not just mere sites of instruction but are also mechanisms for constructing power relations. Questions are raised about the dilemmas and responsibilities faced by faculty and students once issues around power are made transparent in the curriculum itself.

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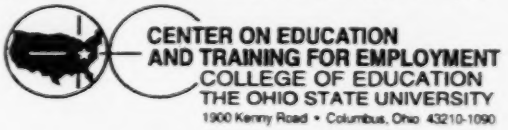
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